Learning strategies and learner characteristics

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ABSTRACT

In article was written about learning strategies and learning characteristics of teaching foreign languages and importance of strategies at the process of learning languages.

Keywords: language learning, native speaker, non-native speaker, learning strategy, learning characteristics.

1. INTRODUCTION

People do not understand everything when they are born, but have to learn everything so that they are able to understand. Take learning Foreign language for example; not everyone can understand it, but some non-native speakers can use the language very well. This is not only the case with foreign language, but also other subjects. Therefore, during the learning process, one might find that some people can learn every subject or several subjects very quickly and well. On the other hand, some people have problems learning. Therefore, many researches try to find how learners go about learning something, what makes learners successful at learning something, and why some people are more effective at learning than others. As Williams & Burden point out, that can only be answered by investigating learning strategies. However, what exactly is meant by the term "learning strategy"? As Wenden[1]says "Learning strategies are the various operations that learners use in order to make sense of their learning". Also, Williams & Burden[2] indicated that when students are involved in a learning task, they have several resources which they use in different ways to finish or solve the task, so this can be termed process of learning strategy. This explanation might be too abstract to understand, so it may be easier to say that learning strategy is learning skills, learning-to-learn skills, thinking skills, problem skills or, in other words the methods which learners use to intake, store, and retrieve during the learning process. Oxford defines learning strategies as "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations"[3]. They do not only aid language learning, but also the learning of other subjects such as maths, chemistry, etc. In other words, when learners start to learn something, they have the ability to respond to the particular learning situation and to manage their learning in an appropriate way. Thus, learning strategy is like footballers who use tactics in order to win a game, when they are in the stadium. Learners use learning strategies in order to learn something more successfully. We have already seen the concepts of learning strategy which, as mentioned previously, should be applied to all subjects. Therefore, over the last twenty years there has been an increasing amount of research into language learning strategies, in an attempt to discover which of the language learning strategies that students use are the most effective for the particular type of language learning involved.

An important part of the descriptive research on language learner strategies has been the linking of self-reported strategy use with learner variables such as gender and level of language proficiency. In examining differences in strategy use between males and females, some studies have found that females use more strategies than males. Others have found no differences in strategy use between females and males. One study found that males used more strategies than females and another recent study found differences in strategy use between men and women related to the type of strategy rather than an overall difference. From an instructional perspective, then, we do not know with certainty whether female or male students are most in need of language learning strategies!

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[1]Wenden, A., & Rubin, J. (Eds.). (1987). Learner Strategies in Language Learning. - Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1987a.
[2]Williams, M. & Burden, R. Psychology for language teachers. - Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
[3]Oxford, R. Language learning strategies: What every teacher should know. - New York: Newbury House, 1990. – P. 8.

However, the relationship between language learning strategies and the student's proficiency level is far clearer. More proficient language learners use a greater variety and often a greater number of learning strategies[4]. Differences between more and less proficient language learners have been found in the number and range of strategies used, in how the strategies are applied to the task, and in the appropriateness of the strategies for the task. In these studies, students' understanding of the task's requirements and whether they could match a strategy to meet those requirements seemed to be a major determinant of effective use of language learning strategies. Higher levels of language proficiency have also been associated with less anxiety and more confidence, indicating that affective factors in addition to learning strategies can influence performance on a task. The implications for teaching are that language learners need to explore different learning strategies, experimenting and evaluating, and eventually choosing their own set of effective strategies. In addition, all learners can profit from learning how to use metacognitive strategies to plan, monitor, and evaluate themselves throughout their learning efforts.

Styles are general characteristics that differentiate one individual from another; strategies are those specific 'attacks' that we make on a given problem. They are moment-by-moment techniques that we employ to solve 'problems' posed by second language input and output. The field of second language acquisition has distinguished between two types of strategy: *learning* strategies and *communication* strategies. The former relate to input – to processing, storage, and retrieval, that is, to taking in messages from others. The latter pertain to output, how we productively express meaning, how we deliver messages to others. We will examine both types of strategy here.

First, we will give a brief historical note on the study of second language learners' strategies. As our knowledge of second language acquisition increased markedly during the 1970s, teachers and researchers came to realize that no single research finding and no single method of language teaching would usher in era of universal success in teaching a second language. We saw that certain learners seemed to be successful regardless of methods or techniques of teaching. We began to see the importance of individual variation in language learning. Certain people appeared to be endowed with abilities to succeed; others lacked these abilities. This observation led Rubin and Stern to describe 'good' language learners in terms of personal characteristics, styles, and strategies. Rubin later summarized fourteen such characteristics. Good language learners:

1. Find their own way, taking charge of their learning.
2. Organize information about language.
3. Are creative, developing a 'feel' for the language by experimenting with its grammar and words.
4. Make their own opportunities for practice in using the language inside and outside the classroom.
5. Learn to live with uncertainty but not getting flustered and by continuing to talk or listen without understanding every word.
6. Use mnemonics and other memory strategies to recall what has been learned.
7. Make errors work for them and not against them.
8. Use linguistic knowledge, including knowledge of their first language, in learning a second language.
9. Use contextual cues to help them in comprehension.
10. Learn to make intelligent guesses.
11. Learn chunks of language as wholes and formalized routines to help them perform 'beyond their competence'.
12. Learn certain tricks that help to keep conversation going.
13. Learn certain production strategies to fill in gaps in their own competence.
14. Learn different styles of speech and writing and learn to vary their language according to the formality of the situation.

Such lists, speculative as they were in the mid 1970s, inspired a group of collaborators in Toronto to undertake a study of good language learning traits. While the empirical results of the Toronto study were somewhat disappointing, they nevertheless spurred many other researchers to try to identify characteristics of

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[4]Bruen, J. Strategies for success: Profiling the effective learner of German. Foreign Language Annals, 34(3), 2001. – P. 216-225; Chamot, A.U., & El-Dinary, P.B. Children's learning strategies in immersion classrooms. - The Modern Language Journal, 83(3), 1999. – P. 319-341; Green, J. M., and Oxford, R. L. A closer look at learning strategies, L2 proficiency, and gender. *TESOL Quarterly 29*(2), 1995. - P. 261-297.

'successful' language learners. Such research led others to offer advice to would-be students of foreign language on how to become better learners.

In addition to developing students' communicative competence, LLS are important because research suggests that training students to use LLS can help them become better language learners. Early research on 'good language learners' by Naiman, Rubin, and Stern suggested a number of positive strategies that such students employ, ranging from using an active task approach in and monitoring one's L2/FL performance to listening to the radio in the L2/FL and speaking with native speakers. A study by O'Malley and Chamot also suggests that effective L2/FL learners are aware of the LLS they use and why they use them. Graham's work in French further indicates that L2/FL teachers can help students understand good LLS and should train them to develop and use them.

2. CONCLUSION

Totally, in 1916, on the eve of the release of the third book, "The White Flock", O. Mandelstam wrote in an unpublished review of the collection of verses Anthology of Muses: "In the last verses of Akhmatova there was a turning point to the supreme importance, religious simplicity and solemnity: I would say after women it was the wife's turn… The voice of renunciation is growing stronger and more in the verses of Akhmatova, and now her poetry is approaching to become one of the symbols of Russia's greatness "[12, p. 44]. These words were not accidentally written after the First World War began, and on the eve of the revolution. Akhmatova's third book includes 83 poems and the poem "Near the Sea". Intimate experiences faded into the background, and civilian lyrics came to the fore. Accordingly, the poetic means also changed - conversational intonations gave way to prayer ones, as in the 1915 poem "Prayer". The loneliness of the lyrical heroines of "Evenings" and "Rosary" in the third book is replaced by "choral polyphony", and Akhmatova's poetry becomes an expression of popular consciousness. This vector will be further developed in the post-revolutionary work of the poetess.

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